

OR, AN
 E S S A Y
 FOR

UNION among CHRISTIANS.

WITH AN
 A P P E A L

To my Brethren of the Baptiz'd Churches
 in *Great Britain and Ireland.*

By S. ACTON. *K*

Ezek. xviii. 25. *Hear now, O House of Israel, is not my way equal, are not your ways unequal?*

Deut. xxix. 29. *Secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are reveal'd belong unto us, and our Children for ever, that we may do all the Words of this Law.*

L O N D O N

Printed; and sold by J. NOON, at the *White Hart* in *Cheapside*, near *Mercers-chapel.* 1732.

Temp. comp. Disgrace

OF A

F. S. A.

FOR

UNION THROUGHOUT THE



A. P. A.

To my friend of the British Museum

By A. P. A.

London

1851

1851

1851

THE
EPISTLE.

BRETHREN,

I *T was doubtless a Fault in Pilate, when he had demanded of Christ what is Truth, that his haste would not suffer him to attend his Answer. No less are they faulty, who take up any Thing for Truth before they have closely examin'd, and prov'd it to be so by God's Word, which is Truth; or to call any thing Error, before they have on due Proof found it repugnant thereunto. The Scripture doth furnish us with the Knowledge of many things, as certain Signs of an Elect Person, to believe in Christ, to live in Love, and to obey the Gospel, are the undoubted Characters of such. 'Tis not thinking ourselves such, nor because others may account us such, nor because we have Zeal enough to declaim against all that think*
and

The E P I S T L E.

and say not as we do, as Free-Willers, &c. whilst it is evident, we are proud, peevish, malicious, revengeful, earthly in Affection, loose in Expression, and scandalous in Behaviour.

Let us therefore put away all Bitterness, Wrath, Clamour, and Evil-speaking. And, as the Elect of God, put on Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. Hold fast Truth in every Branch of it, let it not go at any Rate; and tho you may and ought to contend for it, yet remember, that above all things you put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfectness; so will you grow up in Union and Love, have Peace in your Churches, yea Peace in your own Souls. An Increase whereof is wished by him, whose Heart's Desire is that you all may be saved.

*Namptwich,
Jan. 7. 1718.*

S. A.

Truth

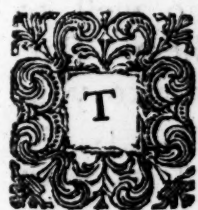


Truth without Disguise ;

O R, A N

A P P E A L

To my Brethren of the Baptiz'd Churches
in *Great Britain and Ireland.*



HE many Indiscretions some of our Brethren have been guilty of, in their Expression and Behaviour towards us, notwithstanding the elaborate Endeavours we have constantly us'd with much Affection, to promote and encourage Union with them, (and tho that in itself be so desirable a Blessing) yet hitherto they have shewn a settled Aversion thereto, on account of our dissenting from them in some matters of Judgment and Opinion ; (tho they themselves were never yet so happy as to be all of a mind, nor to prevent Schism and scandalous Rends and Dividings amongst 'em) which hath now mov'd me thoroughly to examine our own Principles. I mean, those in particular about which we differ ; whether
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they are so Heterodox as they would have and publish 'em to be : which, I thank God, I find to be much otherwise, on an impartial Trial of them by the Standard of God's unerring Word; and have here presented you with a full View of them in their naked Truth, without dress or disguise, after more than forty Years lamenting the Inconveniences arising from undue and needless Contentions, and more than thirty Years been striving (tho to little purpose) by a continued stream of Civilities and Good Will express'd, that, if possible, I might prevail with them prudently to avoid every thing by which their own Salvation may be hazarded, or their present Comfort spoiled, and heartily to endeavour their growing up into an Union in Truth and Love.

But before you proceed, into whose hands these Lines come, I beseech you to dispossess yourselves of all Prejudice contracted; to form your Judgment, and to conclude for yourselves, by the Direction of God's Word, which alone is sufficient to resolve you in all doubtful matters. Be not therefore too implicit in adhering to Education, or in submitting to the Dictates of others, (which is but Tradition) or in concluding further than the Scriptures of Truth do open things unto you; else you may do well to save yourselves the trouble of reading them. But, if with an unbiass'd Mind you read, in order to your receiving Truth so far as with good Evidence it appears to you, then proceed, and the Lord be with you.

As there is not any thing more destructive to a Kingdom or State, than an intestine and civil War, whereby its Blood and Treasure is exhausted, and its Desolation and Ruin threatned, so, nothing tends more directly to eclipse the Glory, to sully the Beauty, to spoil the Peace, and to ruin the Comfort of the Church of God, (at least of particular Churches) than Discord and Feuds among Brethren, which, wherever it prevails, is so contrary to Love,
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the very Nature of God, of Christ, and the Gospel, as only serves to divide Christians in Affection, to crumble them into Partys, proves the Bane of their Peace, the Cause of their Hatred and Envy, and makes 'em a Burden and Nuisance one to another. All which, and Abundance more of a hurtful Nature, ariseth from a Defect of Love; for Love, as the Apostle tells us, *is the fullfilling of the Law.* And therefore he cautions Christians, saying, *Take heed that ye do not bite and devour one another, lest ye be consumed one of another,* Gal. v. 14, 15.

Love! what so amiable, pleasant and profitable! wherever it obtains, there, as on the *Mountains of Zion*, God commands the *Blessing of Life*, and that for evermore, Psal. cxxxiii. 1, 2, 3. What is more affectionately and home prest by Christ upon all his Disciples, than the practice of Love and Charity to one another? without it in vain do we pretend to be his, who hath made it the great and distinguishing Character, and that whereby we shall evidence to the World *that we are his Disciples indeed*, John xv. 12, 17. chap. xiii. 13. Nay further, Love is that which all true Christians shall live in the perfect Exercise of in Heaven; there they shall be intirely reconcil'd: as before their Entrance into that blessed Region, (like as the Prophet dropt his Mantle) differing Parties will drop their Contentions, where they shall enter into a State of Concord, and everlasting Love, 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

Besides, how great Pain and Loss do Christians labour under by cherishing Strife and Contention, whereby undue Distances are kept up among Brethren? How from natural Pride do they slight and despise one another? How by our ruffling Passions do we gall our own Minds, and wound ourselves to offend others, by Invectives and opprobrious Language? And who can enumerate the blessed Advantages we lose for want of labouring a Union in Love?

Further, consider how greatly God is offended, Religion dishonour'd, the Spirit griev'd, the Devil gratify'd, the wicked harden'd, and precious Souls hazarded by your Feuds, and want of Love to each other.

It is to you my Brethren of the Baptiz'd Churches I speak, amongst you is the Cause of my Complaint found, and to you, next to Christ, I appeal for redress. I am satisfy'd, if any People in the World are blessed with the true Form of Godliness, you are. And tho you have some learned, and many pious amongst you, yet I think you have the least share of true Policy of any other People whatsoever. Others we know differ in Judgment, and that in those very Particulars you do, yet they unite, are more wise than to treat one another with Calumny and ill Usage, and their Union in things dispensable (as what is merely speculative is) renders 'em so numerous and formidable as they are. But, on the other Hand, how is the best Cause betray'd, the most Holy Profession expos'd to Contempt, check given to the Success of the Gospel Ministry amongst you, and many Souls hindred from closing with Truth, from your unwarrantable Divisions and undue Distances kept up amongst you?

But if it be asked, who are the Aggressors, and what is the Matter? I answer, *First*, they which offend are the uncharitable and censorious among you, who think so well of themselves, as causes 'em to look askew on, and to think so meanly of, others, and who refuse Communion with their Brethren (I hope) no way inferiour to themselves in the Belief of Truth, and practical Holiness, and whose Churches they are forced to acknowledge as truly constituted as their own. *Secondly*, The Matter is, your too great Fondness of Opinion, and such Opinion too as cannot be prov'd to be authentick and good by Sacred Scripture; and then make your doubtful Opinion the *Shibboleth*, and Test of who are, and who are not,
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worthy to communicate with you ; and grow rigid in your Censures of your Brethren of the same Form with yourselves ; because they cannot run your Lengths, nor come up to you in some particular Notions ; telling them, they are as bad as Papists, and worse, which I shall not here mention. And as a ministring Man, who professed himself, not many Years since, to be very moderate in the great point of *Redemption* ; but it is evident he either dissembled then, to gain his Point, or he has (without good Reason) chang'd his Mind since, saying lately, as I am (just now) credibly inform'd, namely, "*I would as lieve die, as to communicate with Free-Willers.*" And the bad Work made by such Spirits among the Churches, is too apparent, and fit to be lamented.

Towards the Redress of which I will now venture to shew, that the most uncharitable have the least Reason to be so, and those whom they malign as *Free-Willers*, have very good Reason to believe and practise according to what Christ in the Gospel has revealed unto us ; by assigning our Judgment in those Particulars which are the principal and main things we differ in, and about which, when done and consider'd of, let all judge. The things are these four.

I. God's *Decree* about Election and Reprobation.

II. The *Universal* Love of God to Man.

III. General *Redemption* by Jesus Christ.

IV. The Certainty of *Perseverance*, or falling from Grace.

First, God's Decree about Election and Reprobation, we believe is according to what he has reveal'd in the Holy Scriptures, wherein we have his whole Will and good Pleasure concerning Man and his Salvation unfolded and laid open : Or that it is not reveal'd

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veal'd at all ; and if not at all, I am satisfy'd, as it is a Secret and belongs to God only, none can (without proud Presumption) so much as guess at it ; since we are told, *not secret, but reveal'd Things belong to us and our Children*, Deut. xxix. 29. And that they who speak of it as being contrary to the Revelation of his declar'd Purpose and Will in his Word, know nothing at all whereof they affirm.

In this Word, which is his reveal'd Will, he hath given us a full Account of all things he would have us to do, in Order to Salvation : and of many things that he himself will do, for our Encouragement and Furtherance therein. Tho there are many things he hath determin'd to do, which he hath not reveal'd but *reserves in his own Power*, and till he pleases to reveal them, either by an unerring Minister, or in bringing them to light by the Events of Providence, the glorious Instrument whereby he executes his whole Pleasure, and manages all things *according to the Counsel of his own Will* ; and till then, this is truly call'd his secret Will. But that which he has reveal'd and made manifest, cannot properly be called secret : Therefore we cannot think that this Will of God, which is still secret, and lies in the Bosom of his own purpose, and hid from us, can relate to the great Mystery of our Redemption by Christ Jesus ; because, tho that was hid in Ages past, as St. Paul tells us, yet now is made known to the Sons and Daughters of Men by the Gospel, Ephes. iii. 5, 6, 9, 10, 11. But it rather relates to his great Work of Government in Heaven and Earth, of Angels and Men ; where, as the Psalmist tells us, *He hath done whatsoever he pleased*, &c. Ps. cxxxv. 6. and so on. *Tho many are the Devices of a Man's Heart, yet the Counsel of the Lord shall stand*, Prov. xix. 21. *Who, as Job tells us, leadeth Counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the Judges Fools ; he looseth the Bonds of Kings, and girdeth their Loins with a Girdle ; he discovereth deep Things out of Darkeness, and bringeth out to Light the Shadow of Death*, Job xii. 17 to the End.

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And as *Pl. xxxii. 1. God standeth in the Congregation of the Mighty, and judgeth among the Gods; yea, he casteth down one King, and setteth up another as he pleaseth. And* tho many have been the Productions of this his secret and absolute Will, which his Providence has given birth to in all Ages of the World; yet who can tell us of one of them, that is inconsistent with, much less contrary to, what he has reveal'd in his Word? But now (with submission) to the *Decree.*

God foreknowing that Man would fall, tho made upright and invested with a Power to stand, and of acting freely, and by Sin would bring upon himself and Posterity, Misery and Death, and determining thereupon in his own wise Counsel, *To send his one and only Son to be the Saviour of the World,* we believe concerning the Salvation and Damnation of sinful Man, that God's Decree is, namely, *The Purpose of his own Will, before the Foundation of the World, freely to chuse all the lost Sons and Daughters of Adam, who in Time believ'd in Christ to Salvation, thro' Sanctification of the Spirit unto Obedience, and Belief of the Truth.* Not for any Virtue in these Things as perform'd by the Creature; but as *Faith, Obedience and Holiness,* is the only Way in which God has decreed and purposed to chuse Men. As *Ephes. i. 4. 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. 1 Pet. i. 2. and Psal. iv. 3.* And, on the contrary, *He has determin'd in his Wisdom for his own Glory, for ever to condemn all final Unbelievers, and Contemners of the Grace of God and Christ, to be tendred them (according to his Eternal Purpose) in the Gospel.* As *Mark xvi. 15, 16. and John iii. 36.*

But this is very foreign to what others say of the Decree of God, who in their several Confessions of Faith, as the *Assembly of Divines, The Scotch Ministers at Edinburgh, &c.* and some of the *Baptiz'd Ministers assembled at London, in the Year 1689,* to distinguish themselves from *Arminians,* do affirm, almost in the very same Words (making the Assembly their Copy after whom

whom they write) namely, “ *That God from all Eternity did freely and unchangeably ordain, (or decree in himself) all things whatsoever come to pass; and that his Almighty Power extendeth itself even to the First Fall and all other Sins of Angels and Men, and that not by a bare Permission; in which they likewise say, that God did not decree any of these things, because he foresaw they would come to pass.*” And so they make the Decree of God the first Cause of all things whatsoever do come to pass. See the *Assembly’s Confession* Ch. iii. and the 4th Sect. of Ch. v. And *Baptist Ministers Confession*, Ch. iii. and the 2d and 4th Sections of Ch. v.

But who can seriously think of such Divinity as this without Trembling and Horror? as it is contrary to the Nature of God most holy and gracious, and his Word most true. For it’s evident, that to such a height Men may grow in their Abominations, that the Lord complains of ’em for doing things *he neither commanded, nor, says he, ever came into my Heart*, Jer. vii. 30, 31. We all believe God foresaw what they would do, and that they would do just as they did. How is it then that he says, *Neither came it into my Heart?* Why it never came into my Heart, either to decree or to require it. And if it cannot be understood (for any good Reason) that he either will’d or commanded it, then we must for ever quit and renounce their Account of God’s *Decree*, as what is no way fit to be believed; for, according to that Doctrine, all Sins, both of Devils and Men, from the Beginning to the End of the World, were ordain’d of God, and so are necessary and unavoidable. And that Angels and Men, whether good or bad, are no more than mere Machines, mov’d by the irresistible Force and Power of God’s *Decree*, the first Cause of all Things. And if this be true, are not the vilest of Sinners as obedient to the Will of God, as the most Holy Man? do they not each do what he hath ordain’d they should? Nay, where is the
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Difference between Good and Evil? Are not those very things which God condemns in his Word of Truth as most contrary and hateful to him, the very things he hath ordain'd, and by his own Decree made necessary, according to their Account of it? From whence then is it that *Cain* kill'd his Brother *Abel*; that *David* committed Adultery with *Bathsheba*, and afterwards killed *Uriah*: That *Judah* apostatiz'd from God, became Idolaters; and then offered or burn'd their Sons and Daughters in the Fire to their Idols? And from whence is it that all the Abominations committed in and by all the Nations of the World do arise? Shall we say from the righteous Decree of God most holy and gracious? Far be it from us. My Brethren, flee such Perswasion as you would a Serpent; say with the good Old Patriarch, *O my Soul, come not thou into their Secret*: never let that come into your Heart, which the Lord tells us never came into his.

But the Decree of God, according to our Sense of it, is perfectly consistent, and no way jars with any of his Perfections and Attributes; no, nor with his Word most holy and true, which acquaints us, That *God sometimes speaks of things that are not as tho they were*. Rom. viii. 29. *Whom he did foreknow, them he did predestinate*. And ver. 30. *Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justify'd, and whom he justify'd, them he also glorify'd*. That he foreknew all, is certain; therefore our Apostle must be understood, all whom God foreknew in Christ, those he predestinated from Eternity to Life and Happiness. But his calling, justifying, and glorifying of them, must be in Time and Order, that could not be before they had a Being. In like manner he said to *Abraham*, *I have made thee a Father of many Nations*, when as yet he was not the Father of one Child, save *Ishmael*, Gen. xvii. 5. and Rom. iv. 17. Thus also he speaks of Christ, *As a Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World*, Rev. xiii. 8. when as yet he was not

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slain, (otherwise than in the purpose of God) until the Fullness of Time was come, and he appeared a Man in the Flesh, which was many thousand Years after. And so he speaks of his Electing and Chusing Persons in Christ to Salvation, namely, in purpose from Eternity, but actually in Time. And this Sense of the Decree leaves poor Sinners under the greatest Encouragement and Hope, and God at liberty to exercise his Compassion to Sinners indefinitely, Which will appear,

Secondly, From the Universal Love of God to Man, so far as not to will the Death of any One of them ; but, on the contrary, that *he would have them all to be saved*: for which purpose he affords a Means sufficient to all ; not only to them who are and shall be sav'd, but also to them that perish, thro' the Abuse of Grace, and their going on impenitently in sinful Courses, *Tit. ii. 11, 12. Matth. xi. 20—25.* And if this be true, it is all we aim at by the universal Love of God. And so far Mr. *Keach* was an *Arminian*, notwithstanding his signing that Confession with his Brethren *Anno 1689.* who, in his Commentaries on *St. Matth. xxiii. 37.* expressly says, “ *The Lord Jesus hath such Bowels of Pity and Compassion to sinful Mankind, that he would have none of them perish, but come to the Knowledge of the Truth, and be saved, 1 Tim. ii. 3, 4.* He adds, saying, *How desirous is he to get them all under the Wings of his Grace? &c.*” I say, this is all we aim at by the Universality of God's Love to Man. And that it may appear certain to you, as it doth to me, please to consider what follows with an unbiass'd Mind.

1. That Man in Innocency was the Object of God's Love and Delight ; not only *Adam*, but all his Posterity, (being seen at once in him.) As he made Man, *i. e.* every Man in his own Image, he could not but love him ; also in making him Lord over all his earthly Workmanship, and giving him

him but one easy Law, to be observ'd by him, as the Condition of his being continu'd in that happy State, wherein he was pleas'd to know, and to converse with him Face to Face.

2. As *Adam* no sooner fell by Transgression, and became a Sinner with all his Posterity (his Sin being imputed to them) and so all were obnoxious to Misery and Death; even so his great Love and Compassion appear'd, in his very early and gracious Promise of a Saviour in *the Seed of the Woman*, to *Adam* and all in his Loyns, *Gen. iii. 15.* The Plaister was as large as the Sore. No more than all were condemn'd by the Force of *Adam's* Sin, and no less than *all were justify'd by the Righteousness and Death of Christ*, the second *Adam*, it being imputed to all, *Rom. v. 12.* to the end. To Infants, by an A& of sovereign and unconditional Grace, and to Adult Sinners on their *believing in Jesus*, *Rom. iii. 23, 24, 25, 26.*

3. From the grievous Curse God inflicted on the Serpent for his Instrumentality and tempting Man to Sin, *Gen. iii. 14.* And tho *Cain* was of the Seed of that wicked one, from his conceiving and cherishing Thoughts of Blood against his Brother, yet how does the Lord stoop to assure that wicked Man, *that if he did well he should be accepted?* *Gen. iv. 7.* A mighty instance of Love, and of the Lord's merciful Design, which was the preventing both his Sin and Misery, by so encouraging a Promise.

4. When Man had so generally corrupted his Way, and Sin was grown to such a height, that God could not better secure his own Honour than by bringing the Criminals to Punishment, which tho he was determin'd to do by bringing in the Flood upon them, yet *he gives 'em the space of one hundred and twenty Years*, with the Continuance of *his Spirit to strive with them*, to repent and reform, *Gen. vi. 3.* And was not this a mighty expression of Love to a sinful and perishing World? For will any suppose that the means which God afforded them in the Ministry of his Prophet,

and the striving of his Spirit, was too feeble and weak to prevail with those obstinate Men (rightly us'd) sure it was sufficient, tho not effectual, because they abused the one, and resisted the other, as the Jews did, *Acts vii. 51.*

5. What but Love and an Unwillingness to punish and destroy sinful Man, brought the Lord so low, and to so great a Condescension, as to spare Sodom, &c. upon Abraham's Intercession, *if there were ten righteous Persons found in it?* And in the Lord's silencing his pettish Prophet Jonah, on his sparing Nineveh; but mark the Argument he uses, *Hadst thou Pity (says he) on the Gourd thou labouredst not for, &c. And shall not I spare Nineveh, that great City, wherein are more than sixscore thousand (Infants or) Persons, that discern not their right Hand from their left, and also much Cattle?* *Jonah iv. 10, 11.* It seems Jonah, that Bit of ill-temper'd Dust (of the same Lump with ourselves) would rather God had destroy'd the whole City, the innocent with the nocent, than that he would be thought mistaken in his Prediction, or want the little Convenience he had in the Gourd. But God's Proceedings with his Creatures are from Principles infinitely more generous and merciful, *whose thoughts and ways are as high above ours, as the Heaven is high above the Earth.*

6. It is from Love to Man that God gives him his Law as a standing Rule, shewing us our Duty by his Commands, encouraging us to Obedience by his Promises, and deterring us from Disobedience by his Threatenings of Wrath. Also in employing his Prophets and Ministers to beseech and intreat Sinners early and late to obey God's Law, and thereby to *chuse Life, and refuse Death*, *Jer. vii. 25. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19, 20.* Nay further, from his joying at the Conversion of Sinners, *Luke xv. And grieving at their Infidelity and Perverseness, Heb. iii. 9, 10, 17.* And most of all in his sympathising with them that would not walk by his Counsel, *but rebelled against him, notwithstanding their*

their infinite Obligations to the contrary, *Isa. lxiii. 9. and Deut. xxxii. at large.*

7. What but Love makes him so patient and long-suffering with incorrigible Sinners? *who waits, as the Prophet tells us, that he may be gracious, Isa. xxx. 18. and designs his Patience with all the Methods of his Love and Grace therein, a means to bring them to Repentance and Salvation, Rom. ii. 4. 2 Pet. iii. 15. Rev. ii. 20. Please to observe, God is truly said to do a thing, when he affords a Sufficiency of means for the doing of it, tho the thing be never effected; else, what is the meaning of those Words, Ezek. xxiv. 13. Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, therefore thou shalt not be purged? &c. And what but a neglect of such means, made Israel sadly lament and say, The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved? Jer. viii. 20.*

8. Could any thing but Love incline the God of Heaven, infinitely blessed in himself, so affectionately to invite Sinners to come to him for Grace and Life, that did not come, tho he promis'd 'em present and eternal Happiness upon their coming, *Isa. iv. 1. John vii. 37. Rev. xxii. 17. Thus from Love you have him not only inviting wilful and perishing Sinners, but most passionately wishing their Compliance with him for their Good, Deut. v. 29. xxxii. 29. Ps. lxxxi. 10 to the end. Isa. xlviii. 18, 19.*

9. From what Spring but Love can those Expositions arise, which God and Christ use, as, *what could have been done more for my Vineyard, that I have not done? Isa. v. 4. and Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O House of Israel! Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Ye die, because ye will die: and Luke. xix. 42. O that thou hadst known, even thou at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy Peace, &c.*

10. His Love is evident in his melting Commiserations of the woful condition of miserable Men, that would not be reclaim'd by the Charms of Love and Grace; therefore in Tears he says, as *Luke xix.*

O that thou hadst known, &c. And thou that killest the Prophets, &c. How often would I have gathered thy Children together, as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not? Mat. xxiii. 37, 38. Observe, Christ would, but they would not; he often extended his Compassions to them, that did not, that would not pity themselves. Therefore at last the Sentence passed, namely, Your House is left unto you desolate.

11. How conspicuous is his Love, in proportioning every Man's Work to his strength? Not that any Man in the Fall has any Power of his own, but all is deriv'd from God the Fountain. But tho the Law requir'd perfect Obedience, and gave no Strength for doing of it; yet God in the Gospel affords every Man Strength for his Work. If he appoints unto some Men more Work than to others, he furnishes 'em with Power answerable to their Work; as Christ in the Parable informs us, saying, *To one he gave five Talents, to another he gave two Talents, and to another one, (then mark) to every Man according to his several Ability, Mat. xxv. 15.*

12. What but Love to Man, hath inclin'd him to make it our Duty to love all Men, yea, our Enemys, so as to do them Good, and not Evil? But is it to be imagin'd that he hath prest on us the exercise of a Love more extensive than his own? far be it from us so to think. The more we love the nearer we come in Likeness to himself; for *God is Love*, and hath said, *Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, Matth. v. 44. to the end.*

13. To all which add, both his Act and Oath, which is a full Display and Proof of his Love and Goodness; for, says the Psalmist, *The Lord is gracious and full of Compassion, slow to Anger, and of great Mercy; the Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercys are over all his Works, Psal. cxlv. 8, 9.* So loving is his Nature, and so far is he from acting otherwise than in Love with Man (till provok'd by his Sin and Obstinacy)

stinacy) that he confirms his Love with an Oath; saying to Sinners of a very deep Dye, who had basely disparag'd him, in suspecting his Love, and charging him with Inequality in his Proceedings, and therefore for vindicating his Righteousness, and clearing himself from their unjust Imputations, he swears, *as I live, I have no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, nay, I desire not that the Wicked shall die, &c.* Ezek. xviii, and xxxiii. chapters at large. But on the contrary, *He would have all Men to be sav'd, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth,* 1 Tim. ii. 4. Instances for this purpose, might be multiply'd almost without end. Therefore

In fine, his Love appears in the rich and abundant Provision, which of his Grace he hath made for the Relief and Happiness of all, *by sending his only begotten Son into the World,* with a Fulness of all Grace the Sinner can possibly stand in need of. And this is the fullest proof of Love that Man was capable of receiving, and (with Reverence be it spoken) that God himself could give, 1 John iv. 9. And his end in sending so compassionate a Saviour, he tells us plainly, is, if we dare believe him, *Not to condemn the World, but that the World through him might be saved,* John iii. 17.

Thus, without enumerating, you have the universal Love of God illustrated, and set in such a Light that no wise and considering Man, I think, will once doubt of it. But sure I am, no Man can offer half so much, that carries any Evidence of Truth in it, to prove, that God hates any Man, much less hates infinitely the greatest Part of Men, otherwise than as they are *Workers of Iniquity*; and such he cannot but hate, from the Perfection of his Purity, and their Contrariety to him. Therefore let none say, that the Lord hated *Esau* in a personal respect, but in the Nation or People that descended from him, because it is as often said, he hated *Jacob*, and *abhorred Israel*, not the Person, but the People of Israel, *Amos* vi. 8. *Psa.* lxxviii. 59. He hated the former for their Hatred
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and Violence, *Mal. i. 2, 3, 4.* to which the Apostle alludes, when he says, as *Rom. ix. 13.* *It is written, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.* For it is not so written any where else that I know of, and the Prophet there expressly tells us, with *Obad. 7 to 15.* who is meant and intended by *Esau*, whom he hated, namely, *Edom*, or the *Edomites*. And what is said by the Prophets, must refer to them, and not to the Person of *Esau*. But that which may put this for ever out of doubt, is, what the Lord himself says to *Rebekah*, when she had conceiv'd, and the Children struggling in her Womb, she enquired of the Lord, who said, *Gen. xxv. 23.* *Two Nations are in thy Womb, and two manner of People shall be separated from thy Bowels; and the one People shall be stronger than the other People, and the Elder shall serve the Younger.* None sure, can be so absurd as to imagine she had two Nations of People in her Womb, or any more than the two Persons of *Jacob* and *Esau*, from whom proceeded the two Nations of *Edom* and *Israel*. And what is predicated of them, as *the Elder shall serve the Younger*, must relate to the Nations, and not to the Persons of *Jacob* and *Esau*, is plain from the Lord's own Words. And tho it is not difficult to prove that *Jacob* serv'd *Esau* in a personal respect; yet for any to prove that *Esau* serv'd *Jacob*, and that God hated the Person of *Esau*, otherwise than in the Sense that our Blessed Saviour speaks of a Man's hating Father and Mother, &c. *Luke xiv. 26.* that is, loving the one with a lesser degree of Love than the other; in that sense the Lord might be said to hate *Esau*: but to say, the Lord hated *Esau*, or any Man else, so as to reprobate them before they were born, or had sin'd against him, which is the only Cause of God's hating and reprobating any, is what can never be prov'd by the Scriptures of Truth.

I say he hated the former People for their Hatred and Cruelty, and he abhorred the latter for their Idolatry and Wickedness. For God loves a prophane
Israelite

Israelite no more than he doth an uncircumcis'd E-domite; nay, he will rather punish such more severely, as *Amos* iii. 3. So that I conclude, if the Lord be serious in what he hath not only said, but sworn and done, it is an undoubted Truth, when we affirm the Universality of the Love of God to Man. And it cannot be less dishonourable to him for us to limit his Love, which renders him so munificent and amiable to all, than it was in *Israel* to limit his Power, as when they said, *Can God furnish a Table in the Wilderness?* Therefore let not us from ill-form'd notions grudge others a Share in that Love and Grace so desirable to ourselves, since God does not; *nor let our Eye be evil, because he is good.* I now pass to consider the Grounds and Reasons of our Belief of the next thing proposed, which is,

III. General Redemption by *Jesus Christ*: And, if this be true, then I am sure, it puts the other for ever out of question; and that the Redemption which Christ has wrought by the expence of his precious Blood, when he offer'd himself a Sacrifice on the Cross for Sin, is general for all, and for every Man without exception, we hope to put out of doubt: and if we do so, then, it's certain, no Man wants the Benefit of Redemption, but such as exclude themselves from the Benefit thereof by their Unbelief, and Non-acceptance of Christ and Salvation, on the Terms of the Gospel. Either it must be general, or those for whom Christ did not die have no Redemption at all, no, nor ever like to have, *For Christ dieth no more*, as *Acts* iv. 12. But that Redemption by Christ is general in the Design of God, Intent of Christ, and Truth of the thing, tho it be Grace deny'd by many, and wretchedly neglected and abused by more, we shall so fully demonstrate, as to justify 'ourselves in the Belief of it.

1. By assigning some express Testimonies from the Scriptures of Truth for it.

2. By the Types under the Law.

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3. By considering the Subjects of Redemption, as set forth in the Gospel.

4. From some Considerations that make it both necessary and certain.

First, The Scripture Testimonies I shall here cite, are but few amongst many, *Gen. iii. 15. The Seed of the Woman shall break the Serpent's Head.* Now as *Adam* was a common Head and Representative of his whole Posterity, that Promise was made to him, and every Man then in his Loyns. So that Redemption by Christ the second *Adam* is of the same extent as the Fall in the first *Adam*. And this the Apostle affirms (who is worthy to be believ'd) saying, *As by the Offence of One, Judgment came upon all Men to Condemnation: so by the Righteousness of One, the Free-gift came upon all Men to Justification of Life, Rom. v. 18. On whom* (Christ) as the Prophet tells *Israel, the Lord laid the Iniquities of us all*, that is, the all, *who like sheep had gone astray.* He accounted for them, all of them, that they might receive Remission, and *healing by his stripes, Isai. liii. 5, 6.* And as it is here plain that Christ bore the Sins of all *Israel*, so elsewhere it is as plain that Christ bore the Sins of all, both Jews, and Gentiles, which compose the World. And this he did according to the merciful design of God; for, says Christ, *God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son.* But upon what design did God send his Son? it was doubtless for a very different End and Purpose than what sinful Man deserv'd, or could have expected, namely, *Not to condemn the World, but that the World thro' him might be sav'd, John iii. 16.* And the Apostle assigns it in Terms so express and distinct, as if he set himself purposely to establish it for ever, as a Truth most conspicuous and uncontestable, saying, *1 John ii. 2. Christ is the Propitiation for our Sins; i. e. the Sins of the Elect or Believers.* But is it for them, and only for them? Nay, it is for others; and therefore he subjoyns, *And not for ours only but the Sins of the whole World.*

World. God would have all Men to be saved ; and therefore the Apostle tells us plainly, *That Christ gave himself a Ransom for all*, 1 Tim. ii. 4, 5, 6. But perhaps some may object against the Universality of the Term, *All* ; and that it intendeth but a part, and a very small part too (more is the pity.) We confess, according to their present Sentiments, the Word *all* must be restrained, else their Principles are built upon a sandy Bottom ; and that I believe is not hard to prove. In Ver. 1. *Prayers, Supplications and giving of Thanks are to be made for all Men* : Are all Men there intended, ay or no ? In Ver. 4. *God would have all Men to be saved* ; is the Apostle mistaken or not ? If he be not mistaken, as I suppose none have Brow enough to say he is, then it unavoidably follows, that the *All*, for whom Christ gave himself a Ransom, intends all without exception ; and that the Apostle is not of their Mind, who thus object, nor one of their Number, is plain, as he tells us in as comprehensive and concluding Terms as is possible, *that Christ by the Grace of God, tasted Death for every Man*, Heb. ii. 9.

Thus, without multiplying, you have the concurrent Testimonys of the Scripture, in such Terms as fully shew the native Sense, and genuine Design of them in this particular. We need not the private Interpretation, nor corrupt Constructions, of fallible Men, to help our Understanding in this Truth ; the Scripture is Scripture, but human Construction of Scripture, is human Construction, and not Scripture. I pass to prove Redemption by Christ to be general.

Secondly, By the Types under the Law ; namely, the Paschal Lamb, the Manna, and the Brazen Serpent. (1.) The Passover was an Ordinance to be observ'd by *Israel*, thro'out their Generations, wherein the Lamb was to be slain and eaten by every Family, as a Memorial of Safety and Deliverance granted to all *Israel*, as *Exod. xii.* at large. So *Christ the Lamb of God* is said to be slain from the Foundation of the World,

Rev. xiii. 8. *And to take away the Sin of the World,*
 John i. 29. (2.) The Manna which God mercifully
 dropt from Heaven, was for the nourishing of all Is-
 rael, upon their eating of it in the barren Wilderness.
 So *Christ the true Bread came down from Heaven, to give*
his Flesh for the Life of the World, of which, whosoever
eateth, not materially, as the Papists say, nor sacra-
mentally only, but spiritually by Faith, shall live for
ever, John vi. 50, 51. (3.) By the Brazen Serpent,
 which the Lord appointed Moses to lift up on a Pole,
 that it might be presented to the View of all Israel,
 that whosoever of them was bitten and stung by the
 Fiery Serpents, and look'd up unto it, might be
 heal'd. Even so, says Christ, *must the Son of Man be lift-*
ed up, for the Relief of the whole World believing in
 him, whom the Father freely gave in his great Love,
 for a sinful World; and, as we said before, *Not to con-*
demn the World, but that the World thro' him might
be saved. Which will further appear, if we consi-
 der,

Thirdly, The Subjects of Redemption as set forth
 in the Gospel, which is all Men, Saints and Sinners,
 Friends and Enemys, justify'd and condemn'd, Rom.
 v. 8. to the end. All that are and shall be saved, and
 also those that perish. See Rom. xiv. 15. 1 Cor. viii.
 11. 2 Pet. ii. 1. And if this be true, as it seems to
 be evident, then who is it for whom Christ did not
 die, to procure Redemption? But if any perish (may
 some say) for whom God design'd, and Christ inten-
 ded to die, is not his End thereby frustrated? Not
 in the least, any more than it was *when he looked that*
Israel (whom he had blest with every thing needful
 to make them fruitful) *should bring forth Grapes, and*
they brought forth wild Grapes, as Isa. v. 1, 2, 3, 4. But
 pray, if Christ died for all, why are not all saved?
 Why, the true Reason is, not from any want of Love
 and Good-will in God to Man, nor from any want of
 Sufficiency or Merit in the Death of Christ, by which
 full Payment was made for the Redemption of all, but
 they

they perish for their Non-adherence to God, their Unbelief, and rejecting Christ and Salvation on the Terms propos'd in the Gospel. This is the true Cause why Sinners perish; for says Christ to the perverse Jews, *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have Life,* John v. 40. Which may further appear from this Image, or Simile following.

King *GEORGE* (great and good) coming among the Gallies, finds there a hundred of his own People Slaves, sadly gall'd and macerated by the barbarous and ill Usage of their Enemies; and tho it was by a trayterous Revolt from their Allegiance, and willful Rebellion against their Sovereign, that brought them into that Evil State, yet, and notwithstanding their Baseness and Treason, his Royal Heart yearns over them, he takes pity of, and resolves to redeem and pardon, 'em: Accordingly he agrees on the Ransom, and sends his one and only Son over, to pay the full Price; when done, Proclamation is made for their Liberty: but of this hundred whose Ransom is fully paid, there is not more than ten who accept their Liberty, the rest most wickedly and ungratefully, from a contracted Hatred to their merciful Prince, chuse to abide in their Slavery, notwithstanding their Ransom is paid, and their Redemption is fully wrought. You know how to apply it; I need not further, than that they were under no Necessity of continuing Captives, but that they loved their Chains, and chose Slavery, rather than Liberty. And so our compassionate Lord says, *John iii. 19. This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men love Darknes rather than Light, &c.* But that Redemption by Christ is general will likewise appear if we consider,

Fourthly, Some things that will make it necessary and certain. As,

1. All that has been already said, duly thought on.
2. As there is not any particular Man (consider'd as Man) in the whole World to be instanc'd in for whom Christ died not.

3. As

3. As the Salvation of all dying Infants is secured thereby, that cannot be built on any other bottom than the Virtue and Merit of Christ's Death, whereby, as the Baptist tells us, he has taken *away the Sin of the World*. And there is no other Sin but that, which cleaves to 'em; for Men to talk of Elect Infants is very uncouth, and altogether Scriptureless. To baptize 'em for washing away original Sin, for regenerating and making 'em fit for the Kingdom of Heaven, is not only Scriptureless, but superstitious, and impertinent; as it reflects foully on the Merit and Efficacy of Christ's Death, by which alone *God is reconcil'd to the World*, 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

4. To say that Christ did not die for all, and every Man, is to make it impossible for any Man certainly and infallibly to conclude that Christ died for him, for I may conclude and say, (with this one exception, namely, the Sincerity of a Man's own Heart, which none are or can be privy to but God and himself) that no Man exceeds in external Duties and Performances, what a Hypocrite has and may come up unto. And therefore who is it, but under the Power of some shocking Temptation may be drawn to conclude, and say, *I am a Reprobate, Christ died not for me?* And perhaps, what they say in this their desponding State is true, if he died not for all; and thus it often has been with many dear to God: but a stedfast Belief of this great and comfortable Truth, that Christ died for all, and therefore for me, *that living I should not live to self, but unto him that died for me, &c.* will comfortably sustain the Soul under the most harrassing Temptation, and fortify it against the Impressions of false Principles that insinuate the contrary.

5. To say Redemption by Christ is not general, is to reflect foully on him, as if the Free-gift of Grace in Christ's dying, was of less Virtue for Redemption and Righteousness, than *Adam's Sin* was unto Condemnation. If this be not to take the Crown off of Christ's

Christ's head, (as some affect to speak) I know not what is. But the Apostle does not so, he ascribes a Virtue to Christ's Death for Justification, superiour to that of *Adam's Sin* for Condemnation, *Rom. v. 15, 16, 17, 20.*

6. To deny general Redemption by Christ, is to make his Apostles and Ministers false Witnesses, by testifying to that which is not true, as *St. Paul* acknowledges in the Case of the Resurrection, *if the dead rise not, 1 Cor. xv. 15. But God hath raised up Christ from the dead,* therefore we are not false Witnesses. So in the Case in hand, the Apostles witness that *Christ died for all, and for every Man:* but if he died not for all, then their Witness is false; but their Witness is true, because *he died for all, 2 Cor. v. 14. Heb. ii. 9.* And *St. John* with his Fellows do expressly say, as *1 John iv. 14. We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the World.*

7. How can God most righteous be clear, when he judgeth and condemns the wicked for their Unbelief, and the multiply'd sins of a vicious Life as that whereby they have procured to themselves Death and Misery; if God by his unchangeable Decree from Eternity hath ordain'd all those very Sins for which he condemns them, and so they perish as the effect of God's Ordination, and for things they could not, possibly, either avoid, or do? *for who hath resisted his Will?* I say, if it be so, how can he, in humane Judgment, and with reverence be it spoken, *be clear when he judgeth?* But if an ungodly World, by virtue of Christ's dying for it, be condemn'd for their Infidelity, and a voluntary rejecting of Redemption by Christ, O how will both Mercy and Justice then shine, when all will acknowledge *the Judge of all the Earth hath done right!*

But to conclude this Head; some are willing, as I have been told before now, to acknowledge to Christ's Honour, that he dy'd for all: but, for what purposes, think you, did he die for them, who are not of the
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small Number of Elect? Why he did not die to save them from Wrath, nor to procure either Grace or Glory for them: 'Tis only to procure 'em the temporal good things which they enjoy under the Forbearance of God in this World. But this is so far from being a Benefit to Sinners, that it only serves in the issue, to make wrath burn against them ten thousand times hotter than it might have done, had God cut off those he has excluded by his Decree from all Possibility of being saved, so soon as they were born; for then they had been only Sinners by Imputation. I appeal therefore whether their Misery would not, must not have been very gentle, to what the Misery of those must be, who have liv'd sixty or eighty Years in all excess of Riot, and Wickedness, abusing his Patience, and employing his manifold Benefits to his Dishonour, to the intent he may with the greater Fury cast them deeper into the Abyss of Misery? May not Men blush at such Concessions as this, which is a manifest Impeachment of the Kindness and Love of God to Man, and so very pernicious to the Creature? We now pass to another thing, in which our Brethren do not agree with us, which is,

Fourthly, The Certainty of Perseverance, or falling from Grace. Tho I fancy there is very little Reason we shou'd differ about this, being agreed in the main of it. We believe some true Believers have, and may fall from Grace; and that some true Believers shall never fall away: and this is very plain, that such who in an humble and fiducial manner do wait on God in Christ for Grace, and do live in the exercise of Grace receiv'd, such the Apostle Peter tells us, shall never fall, 2 Pet. i. 5—12. And Isai. xl. 29, 30, 31. tho the Youth and Young Man (most likely to stand and hold on their way) do faint, and utterly fall, yet the weak, humble, and depending Soul shall stand firm; for they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength, &c. And, says David, they that trust in the Lord, shall be like Mount Zion, that shall never be moved. And St. Paul is
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no less positive, that *Christ shall present you holy and un-reproveable in the sight of God his Father* (but now mark) *if ye continue in the Faith, settled in Love, and be not mov'd away from the Hope of the Gospel*, Col. i. 22, 23. Christ will take care of such, he will wipe off every blot in their Escutcheon, and, by his own perfect Righteousness, will supply all their Defects, and so present them to God. But for such Christians, or true Believers, who grow remiss, live careless, give way to the Tempter, and, to please themselves, do let down their watch, and daily dependence on God in Christ, for Grace to help them in Time of need, such, I say, may, and have fallen from Grace.

And, if it be true, as Mr. Baxter tells us in his Christian Directory, Book ii. p. 124. “*That for some hundred Years after Christ, till Augustin’s Time, it is hard to find any Christian Writer that clearly asserted the certain Perseverance of any at all. And that he never read of any antient Father or Christian Writer, that ever maintain’d the Perseverance of all the Regenerate, Justify’d and Sanctify’d for many hundred, if not a thousand Years after Christ.*” If so, then this Doctrine of the Impossibility of true Believers falling away, is a Novelty, and not fit to be rely’d on. But in this Case, I believe you will not pay Allegiance, nor have much regard, to what Mr. Baxter and the Fathers say: therefore what say the Scriptures? enough for our purpose; as,

There we have the Lord himself, who is Wisdom and Truth, and perfectly knows the Nature and Efficacy of his own Decree, reasoning with Israel, and discovering a Possibility of a *righteous Man’s falling from his Righteousness*, wherein if he had continu’d he should have liv’d; and not only turn’d from his Righteousness and Life, *but committing Iniquity, and dying in his Sin*, as Ezek. xviii. 24. which with the 21, 22, 23, verses, is the Medium or Argument he useth to convince that captious People of the Equality of his ways, and the

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Inequality of theirs, in thinking or saying to the contrary. See also *Jer.* xviii. 7--10.

And the Lord on discovering to Israel their great Defection and Apostasy from him, which sure none will say was because they had no true Grace, for to say so wou'd be a plain Contradiction to what the Lord himself, (who notwithstanding their wretched Deviation) saith, *Jer.* ii. 21. *Yet I had planted thee a noble Vine (now mark) wholly a right Seed.* Insomuch that their Defection becomes a cause of Wonder, at least of his Enquiry. *How then art thou turned into the degenerate Plant of a strange Vine unto me? what! wholly a right Seed, and no true Grace? strange Construction.* See also, *Rev.* ii. 4, 5. where our Blessed Saviour by the Apostle charges the Church at *Ephesus*, notwithstanding all that he had noted praise-worthy and excellent in her, with such a Decay in her Christian Love and Practice, that he tells her expressly, if she *did not consider from whence she was fallen, and repent, and do her first Works, he would come quickly and remove the Candlestick out of its Place.* Thus you see to what a degree this Church and People were fallen, of whom St. Paul in his Epistle affirms, that *they were chosen of God in Christ before the Foundation of the World, predestinated to the Adoption of Children, and made accepted in the beloved,* *Ephes.* i. 4, 5, 6. Yet, I say, to such a degree were they fallen, that they had no way left to escape the threatned Ruin, but to consider, repent, and reform.

And the Apostle, in opposition to many now-a-days, tells the *Galatians* in so many words, namely, *Ye are fallen from Grace,* *Gal.* v. 4. that is, so many of them as quit their Dependence upon Christ by Faith, whereby they derived Remission and Righteousness; but now, quitting their Trust in him, and *seeking to be justified by the Law, are fallen from Grace.* If any object, that such were never in a State of Grace, it may rather and more truly be thought, that they who do so object are mistaken. For had they never been in a State
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of Grace, it could not be truly said they are fallen from it. Besides, the Apostle tells us, Chap. i. 4. *That Christ dy'd for their Sins, according to the Will of God,* and that as Chap. v. 7. *Ye did run well, &c.*

Another Instance is of some whom *Peter* speaks of, who *had escaped the Pollutions of the World, thro' the Knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, who were afterwards intangled again, and overcome by the Lusts thereof; that it *had happened to them according to the true Proverb, the Dog is turn'd to his own Vomit, and the Sow that was wash'd to her wallowing in the Mire,* 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 22.

And the Author to the *Hebrews* speaking of others *Who were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, enlightned, tasted of the Heavenly gift, and the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come*, for such to fall away, renders it next to an Impossibility to renew them by Repentance, *Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6.* To say such cannot fall away, is to make the Apostle, or rather the Holy Ghost by him, to talk in the Air, very oddly, and to no good purpose.

And *Paul* writing to *Timothy*, charg'd him, *as he would war a good Warfare, to hold fast Faith and a good Conscience (now observe) which some having put away, and concerning Faith have made Shipwrack,* 1 Tim. i. 18, 19, 20. If this Faith had not been true which *Hymeneus* and *Alexander* put away and fell from, *Paul* would never have prest *Timothy*, whom he dearly lov'd, to have held it fast. But it was a true Faith, as it produc'd a good Conscience; for no Man can prove, that a false and hypocritical Faith ever made a good Heart; nor is it possible it ever should: neither is it any where spoken of as a thing blameable for a Man to put away a false and hypocritical Faith.

In fine, All the Commands we have for *standing fast in the Lord*, all the Exhortations we have to watch and pray that we fall not, all the Cautions we have to take heed of Backsliding, and all the Threatnings of Wrath against them that do backslide, surely argues

nothing less than a Possibility of the thing. Nay, the Apostle in exprefs Terms confesses not only a Possibility, but the Certainty of it, saying *Heb. x. 39. We are not of them who draw back unto Perdition: mark, there is a them that do so; but says he, we are not of them, not of that Number, but of them that believe to the saving of the Soul.* I conclude with what St. Paul says of himself, and what he judged necessary to his own final Perseverance, which is (as I said before) a constant depending on God for Grace, and living in the Exercise of Grace receiv'd, that only can keep us from falling; for, says he, *I so run, not as uncertainly, so fight I, not as one that beateth the Air, but I keep under my Body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preach'd to others, I my self should be a Cast-away, 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.* Now if he by any means might become a Cast-away, then sure it is out of doubt that some true Believers may fall away.

I am sensible our Brethren otherwise minded do build the Certainty of all true Believers final Perseverance on such Principles as these following.

1. On the Ordination and Appointment of God.
2. On God's Covenant Promise, which they say is absolute.
3. On Christ's Prayer.
4. On the Absurditys which they imagine arise from the contrary Opinion.

First, On God's Ordination and Appointment, which they infer from Acts xiii. 48. As many as were ordain'd unto eternal Life, believed. And from thence they argue, that they believe and must continue to believe to the end, because they were ordain'd to eternal Life.

But some of the Calvinists themselves as well as others (if I mistake not) give this Text quite another turn. As Mr. Mede in his 3d Sermon on *Acts xvii. 4.* excellently expounds *as many as were ordain'd to Eternal Life; that is, "as many as were Candidates of Eternal Life."* Or as many as were sincerely and honestly disposed to perform whatever God required of Men,
to

to give eternal Life: As the learned *Du Veil* in his Exposition on the Text. And further, says he, in alluding to the ordering and drawing up of an Army, as *Luke's* words here may be rendred, which *Mr. Mede* well notes in the forecited place. "*As many as had given up their Names to Eternal Life, believed; or by an Ellipsis of a Participle, who were of the Band or Company of such as hoped and endeavour'd earnestly to attain eternal Life; otherwise, as many as were in Readiness for eternal Life, finally, and most conveniently, if it be taken in a military Sense, and not of Destination and Appointment.*"

And to the Purposes last mention'd, you have the Learned *Dr. Hammond* giving his Testimony, in Terms full and plain, as you may see both in his Paraphrase and Annotation on the Words.

But if our Brethren will understand it in no other Sense than Destination and Appointment, they have no great Reason to be too positive, because God's Appointments do not always take effect, or things may not always fall out, as he hath appointed; of which you have an instance in *Benhadad* King of Syria, who was taken Prisoner by *Ahab* King of Israel, and dismissed by him, contrary to the Lord's Ordination, whereupon the Lord says, *Because thou hast let go out of thy Hand a Man that I appointed to utter Destruction, therefore, &c.* 1 Kings xx. 42. Thus you see what God appoints may not always come to pass. See also *Ephes. ii. 10.* where you are told, the Christians at *Ephesus* were God's *Workmanship*, in *Christ Jesus* unto good Works, which he hath before ordain'd they should walk in. But did they walk, and continue to walk in them? no, such was their Defection, that Christ tells them plainly, unless they repented he would come and remove the Candlestick out of its place. A sure Indication of his dismissing 'em his Favour. But I believe you will be apt to say, as the Margin of our Bibles, and *Mr. Diodate* doth, that ordained here, is not appointed, but prepared, which God had before prepared, that we should walk
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in them. So others of equal Authority (and for as good or better Reason) do say, ordain'd in *Acts* xiii. 48. imports the same, *As many as were ordain'd*, that is, *as many as were disposed for Eternal Life*, or prepar'd to receive it, on the Terms that *Paul* and *Barnabas* in their preaching offer'd, or propos'd it to 'em, *believed*; and this reading of *Acts* xiii. 48. runs much more smoothly than their reading of the other.

Again, none can imagine, that all who were fore-ordain'd to Eternal Life, were then present at *Antioch* to hear *Paul* and *Barnabas*. But as many as were present, and dispos'd for Eternal Life on the Terms it was tendred, believed. So that we firmly conclude, that as many as believe in Christ, and continue to believe to the End, were ordain'd (in the purpose of God) to Eternal Life. Thus we shall leave it with you to judge for yourselves, tho we do not see, tho all that were ordain'd to Eternal Life do believe, and do continue to believe, that therefore no true Believer may fall away, which hath been made too evident to be deny'd for any good Reason. I pass to the

Second thing, on which they build the Certainty of all True Believers final Perseverance ; namely, The Covenant Promise of God, which they say is absolute : and why absolute ? the Reason is, because there is no Condition exprest, on which God will either fulfil or suspend the Good promised. Tho, I confess, an absolute Covenant sounds a little odd, and is scarcely good Sense ; however, such Promises (for form) there are, *Jer.* xxxi. 33. and xxxii. 40, 41. 2 *Thess.* iii. 3. *The Lord is faithful who shall stablish, and keep you from evil.* And *Phil.* i. 6. *He which hath begun a good Work in you, will perform it unto the Day of Jesus Christ*, and the like. But tho for Form these Promises seem to be absolute ; I appeal whether these may not imply a Condition to be perform'd, as well as others which, in the Letter of them, are no less absolute than these ; as *Gen.* xvii. 8. and xlviii. 4. where the Lord promises to *Abraham*,

to Jacob, and to their Seed after them, to give all the Land of Canaan for an everlasting Possession. Now, tho here is no Condition exprest, yet certainly there is one imply'd, as that *they shall keep the Covenant of the Lord their God, and not provoke him to Anger by their Sins.* For in case they do, as absolute as they imagine his Covenant to be, he lets them know it's quite otherwise; for says he to *Israel*, Numb. xiv. 34. *Ye shall know my Breach of Promise:* read the 27, 28, 29, 30 verses; also Deut. iv. 26. and Ch. viii. 18, 19, 20.

In like manner we have the Lord testifying to *Eli*, 1 Sam. ii. 30. *I said indeed that thy House and the House of thy Father should walk before me for ever;* that is, as my stated Ministers should wear an Ephod, and serve at my Altar from Generation to Generation; but this was upon a Proviso, or Condition, tho not exprest yet imply'd, namely, that they did him the Service and Honour their Post and Character required; which they neglecting to do, and upon their ill Behaviour, you have him declaring a Reverse of his Promise, and recanting his kind Intention, *But now saith the Lord, be it far from me, for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

Again, we have Christ promising, as Mat. xix. 28. *Ye that followed me in the Regeneration, shall sit upon twelve Thrones, judging the twelve Tribes of Israel.* Now this Promise is seemingly as absolute as any, and Judas was one of those twelve to whom it was made. But the condition imply'd, was, that they should always, and to the end, continue in his Service, which Judas failing to do, and falling away, on his non-performing the Condition, the Good of the Promise was suspended; he never came to the Fruition of it.

Once more, our Blessed Saviour saith, as John v. 24. *He that believeth hath everlasting Life, and shall not come into Condemnation;* that is, if he continues to believe; for we can no more suppose it impossible for a Man to cease to believe, and thereupon to have the Promise suspended, than when Christ says, as John iii. 36.

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He that believeth not shall not see Life, but the Wrath of God abideth on him, doth suppose it impossible for such a Man to believe, and on his believing to have Wrath remov'd, and be invested with Eternal Life: so it's evident, those very Promises that seem to be absolute do imply a condition on our part, which is such as these, a continuing in the Faith, *Col. i. 23.* an abiding in Christ's Word, and doing his Commandments; so he tells us, *we shall abide in his Love,* John xv. 10.

'Tis true, our Stablishment is not from any thing we either do or can do of ourselves, but the Lord will have us to exercise a constant dependence on him for Grace, in a religious use of the means he hath appointed; and a sincere attending him therein is the only Medium in which he will accept, stablish and confirm us to the end, and so we shall never fall.

Thirdly, They ground their Perswasion on Christ's Prayer: that Christ was heard in all that he pray'd for, we all agree; tho' all he pray'd for (according to the literal sense) did not always come to pass. As for instance, in *John xvii. 21.* Christ pray'd *that the World may believe that the Father had sent him.* Now I appeal, hath the World in any Age of it believed in him, or that the Father sent him to be the Saviour of it? Again, he prays in great Charity and Compassion for his Crucifiers, as *Luke xxiii. 34.* *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;* i. e. forgive them upon their repenting and believing: but were they forgiven whether they repented or no? I appeal. Also in *John xvii. 21.* he prays, *that all who believed in him might be one, as the Father and he were one.* But one may be tempted almost to believe, that that Petition was calculated for that Age, and not for ours; else, how is it, that there are so many sad Divisions amongst Christians, and that they are so far from labouring after Unity, as rather to resolve on the contrary? as a good Man, and an eminent Minister, on our pressing for Union in the Churches,
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old me (tho I think it was his Weakness) saying, "*It shall never be while I live.*" So that Christ's praying for his People persevering in Grace, intends a due Use of means on their part, as trusting in him, watching, praying, striving and keeping his Commandments, and the like. Otherwise, notwithstanding Christ's Prayer, and tho he was heard in all, in the sense he prayed, we may cease to persevere, and fall as many others have done before us. But the

Fourth thing on which our Brethren are perswaded to believe the Certainty of all true Believers final Perseverance, is, the absurd Consequences which they imagine do arise from the contrary Opinion; and I shall name but one, knowing as it fares with that, so it will with all the rest, should they come under Consideration. They say, if God recedes from his Promise, and hates those he once loved, then he is changeable; contrary to what he himself says, *Mal. iii. 6. I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye Sons of Jacob are not consumed.* Why then, in their Sense, those whom God loved once he must always love, tho they live in the height of Wickedness, and commit all manner of Abominations, else he changeth. But that cannot be true, because his Word tells us, *he hateth all the Workers of Iniquity*; nay, from the Purity of his Nature, and their Contrariety to him, he cannot but hate them, and their most solemn Performances, *Isa. i. 11—25.* and *Jer. xiv. 12.* But on the contrary, *The Lord loveth the righteous, Psal. cxlvi. 8.* But withal he tells us, that *if a Righteous Man turneth from his Righteousness, and committed Iniquity*, God may and will suspend his Love, yea he will hate such a one; not from any Change in him; no, the Change is in ourselves: and by suffering such a Change under the Power of Temptation, and the Dominion of our Lusts, we have forfeited his Love, and justly incur'd his Hate and Displeasure, *For if any Man draws back, my Soul shall have no pleasure in him.* And this account

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the immutable God hath given us in Terms most express and plain, *Levit. xxvi. at large, 40, 41, 42 verses.* But see *Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10.* *At what instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, or concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that Nation against whom I have pronounced turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil I thought to have done unto it. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom to build and to plant it, if it doth Evil in my sight, and obey not my Voice, then I will repent of the Good wherewith I said I would benefit them.* This is the Method our unchangeable God hath determin'd to proceed in, with the Sons and Daughters of Men. If the wicked turneth from his Wickedness, and doth that which is right and good, he will pardon, receive, and love him ; but if the righteous turn from his Righteousness, and doth Evil in his sight, his *Soul will take no Pleasure in him.* For those in *Matth. xviii.* who had all forgiven, afterwards had the whole Debt exacted, because *they would not forgive their Fellow Servants.* Thus you see how God doth and will act without Change. He will forgive the penitent, and abhor the Apostate. I might now take the Liberty to shew you some of those Absurditys that follow on believing the Impossibility of a Believer's falling from Grace ; but that I shall wholly wave, because I am determin'd not to offend. I therefore proceed.

Some say, there are many things spoken in the Scriptures too deep and mysterious for us to understand ; so as to give any certain account of the true Sense of the Holy Ghost therein : that we readily confess ; but the things spoken above are not of that sort, they are plain and easy. But in that there are things hard to be understood may serve to *hide Pride from Man*, to make him suspicious of himself under his greatest Attainment ; to comment on 'em with Caution, and Submission, and to be modest in their Censures of those who differ from them in their Sentiments

Sentiments thereupon. Nay, much better it is not to meddle with those things that are dark and difficult, than by our private Interpretations to spoil the Concord and Harmony of Scripture, or to make them a Bone of Contention, and of separating between Brethren. For whatever God has been pleas'd to leave as a Mystery in his Word, the certain Knowledge thereof is neither necessary nor attainable, till he reveals it by his Spirit, or we attain unto that State wherein all Mysteries shall be unfolded and perfectly understood. *Tho now we see but in part, and know but in part, but what then? must we, because we see but in part, shut our Eyes and see nothing? Reckon upon all things contain'd in the Gospel as unintelligible, wrapt up in Sublimity; must we therefore at present abandon our Reason, and understand nothing in the Word, tho propos'd in Terms so plain and easy, that a Man of common Understanding cannot be ignorant of, but through his own wilful and wretched Neglect? Let us therefore agree in those things that are plain, and walk together in the things we are agreed, till the Lord shall reveal the rest unto us.*

Again, some say, there are many Scriptures that in the Letter of 'em make head against what is here advanc'd: that is also granted; but then they are generally those that are hard to be understood: and is it not unreasonable to build on the uncertain Sense of dark and difficult Texts, in overlooking those that are exprefs and plain to every Man's Understanding, that will but use it?

But further, some may say, the Opinion contrary to you has been, and still is, held and defended by Men as wise, learned, and pious, &c. as ever the Nation was blessed with.

We may allow that also, but then have not Men of equal Wisdom, Learning, and Piety, &c. held and defended the contrary to them? If so, what Advantage get you by that? But if you will not grant that, I suppose you will allow, that those to whom you give

the Preference were but Men, fallible, and liable to err. And therefore to be concluded by their Opinion, against the plain and positive Declarations of God in his Word, in another case, I am sure you would and do disdain.

I can tell you of a whole College of the most Cardinal Ministers, not that of *Rome*, but that once in *Jerusalem*, I mean the Apostles, whose Wisdom, Learning and Piety, &c. you believe was not inferiour to any that either do, or have liv'd since their Days; and yet how were they all mistaken in the Nature of Christ's Kingdom? Notwithstanding the many Lectures he read 'em (during his personal abode with them) sufficient to have satisfy'd 'em, *That his Kingdom was not of this World*. But for all that, so loth were they to let their beloved Notion go, that they ask him after His Resurrection, as *Acts* i. 6. *Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom unto Israel?* From whence we note, that it is not the Opinion of the wise and learned, but God in his Word that must conclude and govern us.

In fine, some say that your Opinion derogates from the Grace of God; if so, I confess it is only fit to be exploded with Indignation. But I rather think some Men are very unhappy in their Thoughts, who are fonder of their Fancy than Truth, and that they who so speak, talk at random, and without any regard, either to Conscience or Truth. And that they who so charge our Principles in the *Universal* Love of God, and Christ's dying for *all Men*, are, in reality, the Men that derogate from the Grace of God, and the only Men that do so. If to derogate, be to disparage and diminish, then I appeal to all rational Men, whether I derogate from the Grace of God, who believe and say that God in his great Love, gave Christ to taste Death for *every Man*, without Exception; or he that will not have it extend further than the elect; which is but a very few comparatively, and for aught any Man knows not one in a hundred. How can the
Grace

Grace of God be lessen'd and disparag'd more, than by limiting it to Bounds infinitely narrower, than what God in his Word of Truth hath declar'd it to be extended. And how they, who say Grace is afforded to all Men, can with any Truth be said to derogate from it, is surely a Paradox; but if it cannot be so said in truth, I am sure it is Orthodox.

Thus I have done what I at first propos'd, and more; but have been led thereto (by some things which just now occur) and I trust in such Terms as my Brethren otherwise minded at present, neither can nor will interpret me design'd to clash or wrangle with them, or to imagine that I have any thing in view, but to present you with naked Truth, to soften some, and to confirm others: and the Premises consider'd, I hope all Men must think the Ground good on which we build, and that we are not so erroneous in our Judgment as some from ill Temper (to say no worse) do endeavour to perswade the ignorant and prejudic'd to believe we are. And that from the probable Truth of our Principles, notwithstanding Mistakes and Weaknesses on both hands, that there is great Reason Christians should bear with, and in matters of Opinion forbear one another, since the best do *but know in part*; and that they walk together in Love; avoiding Wrath and Clamour, and treating one another with invidious Names and Epithets, which only serve to widen the Breach, and to keep the Wound-Bleeding. But the general Proneness of Men thereunto consider'd, may not I appeal and say, Where is that Benignity and Sweetness of Temper, that Candour and Ingenuity of Spirit, that mutual Love, Forbearance, and Condescension the primitive Christians were known by, and made Religion amiable in the Judgment of Impartial Heathens; and would, doubtless, command the Esteem of all Beholders in this our Day, did Christians but live in the due Exercise thereof, instead of the Reverse which is too predominant almost every where.

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As for our being Free-willers, and so termed with an evil Intent, we need not be much concern'd at it ; for certain it is, if we have any Will at all, it is free ; and so our Brethren in their Confession of Faith do acknowledge, even as if our Will is left as free as *Adam's* was. And tho I think what they say is very odd, and what is never to be accounted for, otherwise than to free themselves (as they imagine) from some glaring Absurdities, yet thus they do say, *Chap. 3. Sect. 1.* "*Tho God has freely and unchangeably decreed what-soever comes to pass ; yet not so, as to offer Violence to the Will of the Creature, nor yet is the Liberty or Con-tingency of second Causes taken away, but rather establisb'd.*" Now by this Concession of theirs, who are more high for Free Will then those who most vehemently declaim against it ? We all believe the natural Man's Will is free to Evil ; yourselves believe a good Man's Will is free to Good. But if you will not allow us (under the Influence and Grace of the Gospel) a Will to that which is good, we heartily wish you may have no Will to that which is evil.

Brethren, let us hence unite in Love, and labour by our Union to remove the stumbling Stone out of the way of Sinners, and all occasions of grieving the Saints. For which purpose, let us not so much contend about Notions, as to endeavour *the provoking one another to Love and Good Works.* I praise God, it is not very long since, I heard this Work is set on foot in *London* ; and that the Churches were come nearer together, on their appointing a monthly Lecture, and their Ministers to officiate alternately, or by turns, for cultivating a good Understanding amongst them ; and pity it is but their Christian Example was follow'd by the Churches in our several Countrys. I am confident there is a disposition in some thereunto, and so it would be in others, did they but labour for that Frame and Temper. One of our Ministers of the particular Perswasion in the North of *England*, in his Letter to me, not three Months since, exprest, which as
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it is truly Christian, I shall here mention it to his Honour, it is as follows, namely, “ *I must say, that till our wise and bold Champions on both sides grow more ignorant and less valiant, more loving and less censorious, of a Christian uniting, and not such a dividing Spirit, I never expect to see the glorious Days we are praying and looking for. For my own part, I think one of the particular and another of the general Perswasion are denominated Saints, not from the Notion in their Heads, but from the Holiness of their Hearts; and which of ’em soever shine most in Holiness is most dear to me, as it is that which commands my Esteem, and attracts my Love, &c.* ”

Would we all labour to be like-minded, we might hope shortly to see our Churches united in Love: Christ’s Standard alone advanc’d; Your Assemblies abounding with Converts; And the Praises of your God sounded forth from all Quarters. Even so
Amen.

P O S T S C R I P T.

ARE these things true? what’s the Reverse?

Silence is better than to rehearse.

What’s, Peace and Love your only Scope?

Yes, Peace and Love’s the Christian’s Hope.

Why then do Men of Sense so differ?

Why Scripture Truth they’ll not consider.

Were that the Rule we steered by,

’Twould lead to Love and U-ni-ty.

What is’t then from us Truth doth hide?

Not God, but Satan, and our Pride.

With open Eyes then let us read,

The sacred Text, with Love and Heed.

Which courts us hard, from one and three,

To Peace, Love, and to U-ni-ty.

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Naked Truth, a Plea for Union.

BRETHREN,

I Can truly say when I publish'd those few Pages under that Title, I had nothing in view further than, *First*, A setting our Principles in a true Light, for the softening of some and confirming of others (particularly my Christian Friends in and about *Nantwich*) in a stedfast Belief of the Truth of 'em when I (now in Years) am gone to the Grave; which things are made so plain and evident, and so well warranted by the Authority of God's Word, as makes them deservedly liable neither to Objection nor Suspicion. *Secondly*, To facilitate the way to Union with our Brethren, who have long refus'd their Compliance; notwithstanding they have been duly solicited thereunto. Not that we deem Union under some differing Apprehensions (so far as it has been desir'd by us) absolutely necessary; but as it is good and pleasant, and tends to many excellent Purposes: Therefore we have sought and courted it, and it will be our Satisfaction, that we have been for it, tho' our Essay proves not so successful, as is wish'd it should.

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As my Care to avoid every thing that may justly offend is very conspicuous, so the things advanc'd therein were manag'd with such an Air, and Appearance of Christian Love, as became me to maintain and exprefs to the End; therefore I could not but hope it would have met with a more suitable Entertainment amongst Brethren.

But contrariwise, I am inform'd, That some of my Brethren in the Country, have sent my little Book to *London* to be answered there: True, pleas'd I am, not so much for the Honour done me, as that I am enabled to guess from what Quarter it goes; tho, perhaps, Prudence may govern them at *London* a little more than it doth us in the Country. But should any there be found (more rash than wise) by engaging in a Task so difficult, as the advancing any thing in Opposition to Naked Truth, and for proving that, A Plea for Union, to be false Doctrine, as they would not reflect Dishonour on God, and so render their Performance unacceptable with wise Men, they are desir'd to do it by God's Word, the only Standard of Truth; by which we are to *try all things*, in order to *our holding fast that which is good*. It being certain, That all Opinions and Actions of Men will be pronounc'd by the great and righteous Judge of the World, good or bad, as they have, or have not agreed therewith. Authority fetch'd from the Judgment of Men, tho never so learned and wise, and not from *the Law and Testimony*, will amount to nothing, because the most learned are fallible and liable to err. Neither will Inferences and Consequences of dark and difficult Texts of Scripture, much less of such as relate not to the thing in Debate, amount to any thing. A plain and exprefs Word of God in the Scripture (the only Rule of Christians) is necessary to build the Articles of our Faith upon. For what is not made very plain, by exprefs and authentick Proof, will be ever liable to Objection: Therefore, if those Opinions, which are the Reverse of what I have

propounded, cannot be fully and plainly prov'd by express and positive Terms of the holy Scripture, as those things I have advanced are, may we not safely judge they are not of God, but of Men? I will not suppose they take up their ill-grounded Notions from the ancient Stoicks, who thought (as I find in the course of my Reading) "That all things were govern'd and brought to pass by an inevitable *Destiny*, all things falling out by a fatal Necessity in spite of Men; yea of the Gods also." Nor from that part of the Turkish Divinity, in which they tell us (what becomes Pagans and Turks in their Ignorance to believe, rather than Christians, who have the Oracles of God to teach 'em better, namely) "That God deceiveth whom he will, and whom he will he leadeth to what is Good; for if God would, Men would not war one with another, but he doth what he will, and is himself the Cause of all Good and of all Evil."

Now, I believe our Brethren will be ready to anathematize such Blasphemy as this: Yet how like to this is that Opinion of many, (tho eminent for Learning and Piety) which saith, that God hath decreed in himself all things whatsoever come to pass; not only the End and Event, but the Means also. But is not such an Allegation fit to be suspected, as it is dog'd with gross and innumerable Absurdities; some of which I here present you with, and you may do well to send 'em to the Person you employ, before the Answer be publish'd, that (if possible) he may take off the Force of these Objections, and clear the Reverse to Naked Truth from these and such like Absurdities; for, in so doing, you may save both him and yourselves a second Trouble. Withal, you may advise him in his Reasonings to accommodate himself to the Capacity of us Country People, (who are not well vers'd in mystical and metaphysical Strains) by expressing himself in plain and familiar Terms, studying to make hard things easy, and not to make plain things dark and doubtful, by

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turning exprefs and positive Scripture into an Allegory, left he becomes a Barbarian to us; for tho some, by an implicit Faith, may receive by the Lump all that may be said, that countenances their present Opinion, right or wrong; yet some will, *Berean* like, examine those things, and bring to the Test what may be offered by their Advocate. And whoever it be, all I desire of him in his Performance is, That he expresses a due Regard to the Honour of God, for the illustrating of Truth, and promoting Love and Peace among Brethren; the only Scope and Design of naked Truth; which, with its Answer, are like to stand on their own Legs. Provided Satire and unchristian Reflections be avoided, then let them obtain, according to the Goodness of their Design, and the Evidence of Truth that appears in them: For I know not that I shall ever employ myself farther in this, or any other Controversy. The Study and preaching *Christ*, in the Riches of his Love and Grace to Saints and Sinners, hath been, and now is, according to Ability received, much more agreeable, yea, the Choice and Delight of my Soul. And confident I am, that things rightly consider'd would make us more moderate and cool in our Censures, yea, more apt to love, pity, and pray for each other. But the Principle or Position I spoke of, is what many of the Baptist Ministers, (our Brethren of the particular Persuasion) in their general Assembly at *London*, Anno 1689, have concluded on, and publish'd as one of their first Principles, and grand Articles of their Faith, who speaking of the Decree, do say as follows, namely, " That God from all Eternity did freely and unchangeably decree in himself, " all things whatsoever come to pass; and that his Almighty Power or Province, extendeth itself to the " first Fall, and all other Sins of Angels and Men, " and that not by a bare Permission; for, say they, God " did not decree any of these things, because he fore- " saw they would come to pass." But as others, so Mr. *Calvin* expressly tells us in his *Institutions*, Book 3.

Ch. 33. Sect. 7. "That he doth no otherwise see
 " things that shall come to pass, than because he hath
 " decreed that they shall so come to pass, and that all
 " things happen by Ordination or Commandment."
 So that by this Principle, they make God's Decree the
 first and only Cause of all things whatsoever do come
 to pass. Now, that this Opinion, with what is said
 above, is very dishonourable to God, and pernicious
 to Men, will appear, if we duly consider these 12 things
 following: and if it does so appear, I appeal whether
 it is not fit we should explode it. For,

First, Does it not charge Imperfection on God, who
 is infinite in all his Attributes? Yes, this Principle
 makes the Prescience and Fore-knowledge of God to
 be finite: nay, before the Commencement of the De-
 cree, that he foresaw nothing at all: if it be true as
 it's said above, namely, That he doth no otherwise
 foresee things, than as he decrees they shall come to
 pass. But sure this is a Conception unworthy of the
 ever-blessed God. Why then, admit the Decree to be
 as God himself is, without Beginning, yet to bound
 and limit the Fore-knowledge of God to a certain and
 determinate Number of Persons and Things, is to
 make it finite. For there is no stinted and limited
 Number, but might have been more or less, if God
 had been so pleas'd; therefore to say he foreknew
 nothing, but what he decreed should come to pass;
 and as no fixed and determinate Number, how great
 soever, is infinite, why then, to bound, limit, and tie
 up the Fore-knowledge of God to a certain and fixed
 number of Persons and Things, is to make it not infi-
 nite, but finite; which is both dishonourable and in-
 jurious to God; *whose Understanding*, as the Psalmist
 tells us, *is infinite*, Psal. cxlvii. 5. that is, He as well
 knows what things might have been, had he been
 pleas'd they should, as he doth the things that have
 been, are, and shall be to the end of Time. And,

Secondly, Does not this Principle manifestly reflect
 Disparagement upon, and argue a Weakness of Mind
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in God, whose Excellency and Perfection renders him the alone worthy Object of the eternal Adorations of blessed Angels? All whose Counsels are wonderful, and the Events of them do wonderfully shew forth the Wisdom, Righteousness, and Goodness of 'em. And that the things which he in Wisdom decreed in his eternal Counsel, are worthy of the Dignity and Majesty of God; whose Wisdom and Goodness is founded forth by all his Works. If Emperors and Princes, whose Time and Counsels ought to be employ'd about the Affairs of State, and for the Good of their People, should spend their Time in catching of Flies, in playing on the Fiddle, and the like, would it not argue them childish, and to be Men of weak Minds, their high Quality, and exalted Dignity consider'd? It is the Greatness and Goodness of Things concluded on in Council, that speak forth the Wisdom and Conduct of the Counsellors. Now, so great and good are the things which God (the holy and blessed Trinity) concluded on, in the Council held before the World was; That the Greatness and Goodness of them made them necessary, and the Subject of his eternal Purpose and Decree; which, according to the Revelation God has given us thereof in his Word of Truth, were such things as these; namely, Of God the Father loving the Son (incarnate or in the Flesh) before the Foundation of the World, *John xvii. 24.* Of Christ's revealing the Doctrine and Grace of the Gospel, (and very probably that in *Mark xvi. 16.* *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,*) kept secret from the Foundation of the World, *Mat. xiii. 35.* Of Christ's being made a Sacrifice for Sin, or a Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World, *Rev. xiii. 8.* *1 Pet. i. 20.* Of Believers chosen in Christ before the Foundation of the World, that they should be holy and without blame before him in Love, *Eph. i. 4.* And of a glorious Rest and Reward for all obedient Believers, in a Kingdom prepared for them from the Foundation of the World, *Mat. xxv. 34.* All these things are worthy of
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the Majesty and Wisdom of God, in his Council, to ordain, and bring about; and is what will secure to him Honour and Glory from Angels and Men; for the Wisdom of his Contrivance, and the Goodness of his incomparable Works and Doings; and except his *creating and governing the World, according to the Council of his own Will*, I know not that he hath declared any thing further to be what he hath decreed in his eternal Purpose; and if he hath not revealed further, Can we suppose that every Motion of an Atom, that every Sand and Straw carried to and fro by the Wind? that every winding of a Bird in the Air? the Bark of every snarling Cur? that every Hiss of a Serpent? that every Leap of a Flea? the Croaking of every Toad? every Antick of a merry Andrew? the Vomit of every Drunkard? and that Brethren should, (from Pride and ill Temper) envy and vex one another? I say, can we suppose these are things which God in infinite Wisdom decreed, and are the Results of his wise Counsel, without charging him with Weakness? We all know that these, and many such like things do happen, and come to pass, and, to the Honour of God, we do say he permits them, (as things contingent, that might be or might not be, for ought that God hath ordain'd to the contrary) yet by his wise Providence, he rules and governs every Occurrence, how inconsiderable soever for his own Glory: But to say he decreed and made these (and such like things) the Subject of his wise Counsel, we cannot without reflecting Weakness upon him. And not only so, but,

Thirdly, Does not this Principle reproach and revile the ever blessed God in the highest Degree, as it makes him the Author of all Sin, that hath been, is, or shall be committed to the end of the World? 'Tis true, this Position is so blasphemous that the Defenders of it, (with whom I have convers'd) use many Shifts to evade a Thing so notoriously absurd. But all their Shifts and Evasions are insignificant to their Purpose. For if God by an unchangeable Decree, (as they

they say) has ordain'd the first Fall of Angels and Men, and all other Sins committed by them, then all the Sin committed in the World is made necessary and unavoidable by his unalterable Ordination. Besides, (say many) he excites, impels, and moves Men to Sin. But to say so, except it be in some extraordinary Case, as when provoked to anger by bold and audacious Sinners, and for Contempt of his Grace, he may, in a judicial way, let 'em go on in their wicked Courses without Check, because he will destroy them, *Isa. vi. 9, 10, 12.* and *Ezek. xiv.* at large; But to say that God either decrees or moves to Sin otherways, is no less false than blasphemous. For the Lord himself acknowledges things to be done by Men, that *he neither commanded,* nor (says he) *ever enter'd into my Heart,* *Jer. vii. 30, 31.* That God foreknew what they would do, is certain, and that they would do just as they did; but it never came into his Heart either to ordain or command it: no, Sin is none of God's Offspring, 'tis wholly from the Devil and ourselves, and is, what God most holy loaths and detests; therefore he sollicit *Israel* in a very pathetick Manner, saying in *Jer. xlv. 4.* *O do not this abominable thing that I hate.* What hate it, and yet decree it? Strange Divinity! far be it from us so to think of him, whose pure Eyes cannot behold Iniquity.

Fourthly, Does not this Principle destroy all Difference between Good and Evil, and make that which we, yea, that God in his Word calls Good and Evil equally necessary? and that they who blaspheme God, and wallow in Drunkenness and Uncleanneſs all their Days, do the Will of God no less (they being ordain'd thereunto) than they who, by his Grace, *do deny Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent World;* which is quite contrary to what the Lord himſelf ſays to *Cain,* *Gen. iv. 7.* *If thou doſt well, ſhalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doſt not well, Sin lyeth at thy Door.* And *Mal. iii. 18.* He will make difference between the Righteous and the Wicked,

ed, *between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not*, according to our blessed Saviour, in *Mat. xxv.* at large.

Fifthly, Does not this Principle make the Grace and Love of God, in the Gift of his only begotten Son, for and to us, insignificant and fruitless? For tho according to the Gospel, God gave him to redeem lost Sinners *from Sin and Wrath*, and to make 'em, by virtue of that Redemption, *holy and happy*; and tho this was the greatest Grace miserable Sinners were capable of, yea, with Reverence be it spoken, that God himself could give: Yet what Influence can the holy Life of *Christ*, as our Example, have upon us? Or what can his meritorious Death and Passion avail us? Who is or can be profited thereby? If God, by an unchangeable Decree, hath ordain'd Men (Sinners) to be what they are, and made them incapable of a Change, in their Nature, Actions, and the Issues of them, but by his irresistible Decree. If God had justify'd some from Eternity, and reprobated all the rest of *Adam's* Posterity, then the Life, Death, and Mediation of *Christ*, is altogether fruitless to Sinners: but God forbid that any should conclude so, or say in this, as the Apostle does in another Case, namely, *That if Righteousness comes by the Law, or any other way, than believing in Jesus, as Gal. ii. 21. then is Christ dead in vain.* Now, is this Doctrine worthy of any better than an Anathema? I appeal. Nay,

Sixthly, Does not this Opinion lie very cross, and run counter to the whole Tenour of the Gospel? which is a Doctrine according to Godliness, as the Design of it is to make Men holy by the Authority of its Precepts, *1 Pet. i. 15, 16.* and by the Encouragement of its Promises, *2 Cor. vii. 1.* But of what Force and Efficacy can the strictest Precepts, and most alluring Promises be to us, if God, by an absolute and unchangeable Decree, has ordain'd, *That we shall resist and oppose the powerful Arguments of his Word and Spirit?* which is evident the Generality of Men do: And if

if we repent, believe and obey the Gospel, our doing so is not from any Force or Energy of the Gospel, but from his irresistible Decree and Ordination; by which he hath determin'd us to do what we do, and made it impossible we should do otherwise, under the most encouraging Motives the Gospel affords us. Nay, if this Doctrine be true, what does all the gracious and kind Offers that God makes to poor Sinners, of Pardon, Peace, Acceptation and Salvation, in the Gospel amount to, but that he is insincere and not in good earnest in what he says and offers? Yea more, that he is severe and cruel, first, by making us Sinners, and then in disabling us (as such) by his own Decree to fall in with the Terms of the Gospel, and ordains them to sin, in refusing the Grace he thereby freely offers them, on purpose that he may eternally punish 'em in Hell, for such their Contempt and Refusal. And doubtless, this is a Cruelty the most barbarous and wicked in the World cannot be charged with, without expressing their Detestation and Abhorrence of it. For when the Prophet in Tears told *Hazael*, who was to be King of Syria, *That he would burn the strong holds of Israel, slay their young Men with the Sword, dash their Children, and rip up their Women with Child*; he replied, with the utmost Indignation and Resentment, saying, *But what is thy Servant a Dog, that he should do this great Thing?* 2 Kings 8. 12, 13. Pray consider of this, and make a good Use of it; for who can proceed further without trembling? that *God who is gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in Goodness and Truth*, should by such Doctrine be represented to poor Sinners, to be less compassionate and more cruel than the worst of Men, yea, than the most savage Animal is to its Brood and Off-spring; as if he delighted in the Blood and Misery of his Creatures, for no other Reason but because he will have it so; tho there is not any thing he is more averse to; who, upon Oath, most solemnly testifys, *That he neither hath Desire of, nor Pleasure in, the Death of the*

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Wicked,

Wicked, but rather *that they should turn and live*, as appears at large in the 18th and 33d Ch. of *Ezek.*

Seventhly, Is not this Opinion a Scandal to the Heathen, and an Obstacle to their Conversion? For if you first print on their Minds this your first Principle, (next to the Being of a God) That he, from all Eternity, did freely and unchangably ordain all things whatsoever come to pass; not only the first Fall, but all other Sins of Angels and Men; then with what kind of Hope can you proceed to labour their Conversion? Must not all such Men, under the influence of this Principle, account (and laugh at) your most vehement Perswasion, under the most encouraging Views of Glory and Happiness, for moving them to leave their Idols, and to embrace Christianity, as being no other than Wind and Vanity? If God has ordain'd me to be as I am, and to do as I do, (may such a Man say) is it possible for me to be and to do otherwise? No, not unless God must act besides his own immutable Purpose. Thus, the most powerful and perswasive Ministry in the World, is made of no Effect, and is indeed no other than a *sounding Brass and a tinkling Cymbal*; a mere Sound of Words, which can no more remove the Scandal and Obstacle out of the way of their Conversion, than the whistling of the Wind in the Air can do. Nay,

Eighthly, How impertinent and vain does this Principle make all Advice and Endeavours of Ministers and others by their Doctrine, Example, &c. to perswade to the Love and Practice of Virtue and Goodness, under the Encouragment of obtaining thereby the Favour both of God and Men? Also, to what purpose is the Sorrow and Tears of Ministers, Parents and Friends, upon the ill doing of their People, Children, and those they dearly love: to fret and grieve, to chide or threaten any on their evil doing, is but to quarrel with God and his Ordination; for if God has determin'd they shall do just as they do, then cease your Intreatys and Tears: Nay, to what purpose
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is their most fervent Prayers, (in such Case) but to solicit God to that which is not possible he should do, namely, to alter his Decree and become mutable; I say, cease your Prayers, it must not, it cannot be otherwise. Thus all those excellent Passions God hath planted in the Nature of Men, enclining them to rejoyce in the Good, and mourn at the Evil, done by them over whom they preside, are made fruitless and useless: And the Grief of tender Parents on the undutiful and wicked Behaviour of their dear Children, is nothing else but to find fault with God, and to impeach the Justice and Goodness of his Decrees. And is not this sad? But,

Ninthly, What a Handle does this Opinion put into the Hands of Sinners, to a making them most desperate in their evil Courses, and for setting them out of the reach of all Perswasion? who frequently conclude and say, if I am ordain'd for Life I shall be happy, tho *I add Drunkenness to Thirst, and walk in the Imagination of my own Heart.* It is not any thing that I can do, saith a presumptuous and deluded Soul, that can alter the Decree, and make void the Ordination of God; and, on the other Hand, if I am destin'd to Death and Misery, the Sinner concludes, should I spend my Days in Tears and Prayers, in repenting, believing and obeying the Gospel, it could avail me nothing to Salvation; notwithstanding the Lord himself hath said, *He that repents, believes and obeys the Gospel, shall be saved.* Thus mischievous and pernicious it is to poor Sinners, that it shuts up their way to, and disswades from Duty; yea, it locks 'em down in the Fetters of their own Lusts, but so much the faster.

Tenthly, What a Ferment of Pride and Bitterness of Spirit does this Leaven commonly work in those who receive it. Do they not value and exalt themselves as the only Orthodox? and are they not very prone to traduce and speak evil of those who cannot think and speak, in this Particular, as they do, and refuse Communion with those of the same Form with them-

selves in the order of the Gospel? Is not this plainly to
 say with those in the Prophet, *Stand off, come not near,
 I am holier than thou?* but is this pleasing to God, as
 that which he hath ordain'd to be done, think you? *no*,
 it is the quite contrary, and what is most distast-
 ful to him; who says of such Persons in *Isa. lxxv. 5.*
These are a Smoke in my Nose; a Fire that burneth all the
Day. And as it furnishes them with an undue Con-
 ceit of themselves, so it doth with Prejudice and Bit-
 terness against their Brethren that differ from them;
 which appears by the foul Names and Epithets they
 fix upon them, as *Free-Willers, Papists*, yea worse than
Papists, &c. by which they do not only persecute 'em
 with the Tongue, but if they could, without being cul-
 pable, perhaps, some would persecute them to Death
 too; a sad Instance of this Madness, we have record-
 ed in *Mr. Calvin*, who accused and procured *Michael*
Servetus, who was said to be a learned and godly
 Minister of Christ, (but not altogether of *Mr. Calvin's*
 Mind in the point of Baptism) to be burned with his
 Books at *Geneva*, for his Mistake in the blessed Trini-
 ty, (tho, it is said, *Mr. Calvin* himself was more er-
 roneous in his Opinion of that great Mystery) for
 which Cause he was noted by some wise and learned
 in his Day, as a Fratricide and Killer of his Brother:
 and is it not very common, when they who are leav-
 en'd with this Doctrine do meet with a few Leaves
 that thwart their beloved Notion, to say, they are
 only fit to be burned? and had such Men Power, who
 knows but they would burn the Heretick and his He-
 resy together? tho it is possible what they call Heresy,
 is the plain and naked Truth of the Gospel of *Christ*:
 which is a Frame quite contrary to the sweet and be-
 nign Spirit of the Gospel; as it obligeth us, *To put*
away from us all Bitterness and Wrath, and Anger and
Clamour, and evil speaking, with all Malice, *Eph. iv. 31.*
And as the Elect of God, that we put on Bowels of Mer-
cies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-suf-
fering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,
Col. iii. 12, 13.

Eleventhly,

Eleventhly, How does this worst of Doctrines lead Men, (Ministers as well as others) to express themselves in very wild and extravagant Terms, in Terms both false and foolish; of which I shall give you an Instance or two: the first is of Mr. *Samuel Richardson*, who in his Treatise of the Misery of the natural Man's State, *Page 38th* saith, (by way of Objection) "I know there is many will cavil and say, If Christ must do all, and Men nothing, then Men need not care what they do, but live as they list." To this he replies and says,

"As it is our Duty, so it is our Desire to do whatsoever the Word of God requires; but we are not required to do any thing to procure the Pardon of Sin, but in reference to Service and Duty: I count my self to be never the nearer Heaven for my best Works, than if I had done nothing else but blaspheme God." Is not this rare Divinity? And whether he did not blaspheme God in so saying, I leave to all that will calmly read and consider what the Lord himself says contrary to him, *Isa. i. 16, and xxvii. 18, 19, 20. and lv. 7. Acts ii. 37, 38. and xvi. 30, 31. And our blessed Saviour, Mat. vii. 21. Mark xvi. 16. Likewise Acts iii. 19. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the Presence of the Lord.* From these and such like Passages, 'tis evident, That God and Mr. *Richardson* are of very contrary Minds.

Another Instance you have in Dr. *Crisp*; who, in one of his Sermons is reported to say, namely, "Let me speak freely, and in so doing tell you, That the Lord hath no more to lay to the Charge of an elect Person, in the Height of Iniquity, and in the Excess of Riot, and committing all Abomination that can be committed; I say, when an elect Person runs such a Course, the Lord hath no more to lay to the Charge of such a Person, than to the Charge of a Believer, nay, than to the Charge of a Saint triumphant in Glory."

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Also, in his Sermon called *Christ the Way*, amongst many monstrous Births, and ill-grounded Assertions, he saith, "Men think Righteousness brings them near to *Christ*; Beloved, Righteousness is that which puts a Man away from *Christ*: Stumble not at the Expression, it is the choice Truth of the Gospel."

Upon which, as I have read, a sober Man cryed out, "O prodigious Profaneness! it is the foul Language of Hell! Hell itself hath not a more devilish Expression!"

Twelfthly, Who can imagine how *Christ* in the last Day will judge the World in Righteousness? by what Rule? by the Gospel, or God's Decree? For what will he judge them? for their own voluntary Works, or for things they could not but do, by the Ordination of God? And how *Christ* will reward some in that Day, as good and faithful Servants, since all was involuntary on their Part, and punish all the rest, as slothful and wicked Servants, is what the Reason of Men can never understand nor account for; for it is not capable of Demonstration. Tho a future and eternal Judgment by *Christ* is acknowledg'd one of the grand Articles of the Christian Faith; but, according to their Tenet, all Men equally do the Will of God, in that they have done, and could not but do, what he ordain'd they should do. And so I leave it, as that which the Defenders of this Doctrine can never resolve to be otherwise than according to the Gospel of God, and our Lord *Jesus Christ*; namely, That Men shall be judged and rewarded for their own personal and voluntary Works and Doings.

Thus I have presented to you some of the unsavory Fruit that grows from this bitter Root of Destination, in the Terms they have express'd the Decree. And while it so stands, as it is justly suspected foreign to Truth, so it lies open to very formidable Objections, and liable to be charged (as you see) with gross Absurdities. It must be confessed that many learned and pious

ous Men, as well as others, have and do zealously maintain this Principle among our Brethren; but may it not be too truly said of them, (the Premises consider'd) *They have a Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge?* And is it not because they will not bring it to the Test, affecting Bigotry in Opinion, contrary to our undoubted Duty, of *walking together in the things wherein we are agreed, and to consider one another, so as to provoke to Love and good Works?*

Will Christians in the same Form and Order of the Gospel, neither from politick nor religious Considerations unite, by laying aside their Pique and Prejudice, to love and live like Friends in Amity; for helping each other forward in the Service of our great Lord and Master, when we see Kingdoms and States in Enmity, and at the greatest Distance from each other, reconcil'd and brought into Alliance; whereby they willingly give up their private Interests, which they long and sharply contended for at the Expence of so much Blood and Treasure, and to make the Interest of each other their own, and this from politick Considerations only? Whereas Christians are under stronger Obligations thereunto, yet none so hard to be brought from their undue Distances as they; for want of a calm and thorough Consideration of Things with their Consequences. Tho, if we judge according to common Observation, we may with Safety conclude, That those who are furthest from Peace on Gospel Terms, are most in the Wrong: And may it not be said to such, as our meek and compassionate Saviour did to his Disciples, *Ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of?*

I believe many hold this Opinion, that are not aware of its being inconsistent with the gracious Nature of God, nor of its being dishonourable to him, and pernicious to Men; and that if they did apprehend it to be so, they would for ever explode it: Let us therefore praise and adore our God for *the Light of our Eyes*, and in all things maintain a Christian Temper towards our Brethren, and endeavour to promote Union

on with all who are in the Order of, and *whose Conversation is as becomes, the Gospel of Christ.* And let us pity and pray for the rest; knowing that we ourselves may be as imperfect in the Belief and Practice of some other Truth, as our Brethren are (for good Reason) suppos'd to be in this. For here, as the Apostle tells us, *We see but in part, and know but in part.* Let us therefore cast the Mantle of Love over each other's Weakness, (of which I am sure there is need enough) *and put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfectness,* that by walking in Love, we may guard against the Approaches of Pride and ill Temper, and be such as have *learn'd of Christ, by following after the things that make for Peace, and things wherewith one may edify another;* that, if possible, we might have more of Heaven here: It being certain, all that enter that blessed Region will live in Love, Peace, and Concord for ever. *Amen.*

Nantwich,
February the 10th.
1719.

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